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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of parenting style on adolescents' attitudes toward nurturance and self-determination rights. Subjects were 121 adolescents (48 males and 72 females, 1 not identified), ranging in age from 11 to 16 years, and their parents. Subjects completed measures for parenting style, attitudes toward nurturance and self-determination rights issues, and attitudes toward political issues. The adolescents completed the parenting style questionnaire twice, once for each parent, and the rights questionnaire was completed as it applies to a 12-year-old child. Responses indicated that adolescents' attitudes toward self-determination issues, but not nurturance issues, were related to the level of perceived responsiveness of their mother; a low level of responsiveness was associated with greater endorsement of these rights issues. In other words, controlling for age and sex, adolescents who perceived their mothers as authoritative had, on average, lower scores on the self-determination scale of the Children's Rights Attitudes Questionnaire (CRAQ) than adolescents who perceived their mother as either uninvolved or authoritarian. This finding was contrary to expectation, but provides evidence that young people's attitudes toward self-determination rights are shaped by experiences at home, though in response to a parent whom they perceived to be not encouraging of their psychological development and responsive to their needs. It is suggested that a strong commitment to self-determination rights by adolescents may be a negative outcome, reflecting an unqualified sense of entitlement and lack of awareness of one's rights bounded by the rights of others. The effect of responsiveness in parenting may serve to temper these beliefs and moderate the strong endorsement of self-determination rights issues. (Contains 10 references.) (HTH)

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Parenting Style as a Context for the Development of Adolescents' Thinking about Rights

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the role of parenting style on adolescents' attitudes toward nurturance and self-determination rights. 121 adolescents (48 males and 72 females, 1 not identified), ranging in age from 11 to 16 years, and their parents, completed measures of parenting style, attitudes toward nurturance and self-determination rights issues, and attitudes toward political issues. The adolescents completed the parenting style questionnaire twice, once for each parent, and the rights questionnaire was completed as it applies to a 12-year-old child. Results indicated that adolescents' attitudes toward the self-determination issues, but not the nurturance issues, were related to the level of perceived responsiveness of their mother; a low level of responsiveness was associated with a greater endorsement of these rights issues. In other words, controlling for age and sex, adolescents who perceived their mothers as authoritative had, on average, lower scores on the self-determination scale of the Children's Rights Attitudes Questionnaire (CRAQ) than adolescents who perceived their mother as either uninvolved or authoritarian. This finding was contrary to expectation, but provides evidence that young people's attitudes toward self-determination rights are shaped by experiences at home, though in response to a parent whom they perceive to be not encouraging of their psychological development and responsive to their needs. The implications of the study findings are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The present study examined the role of parenting style on adolescents' attitudes toward various rights issues. This notion is in keeping with Melton (1980), who stated that children's and adolescents' understanding about rights is "probably dependent upon having experienced rights (p. 186). While children may experience rights in various contexts (e.g., family, peers, school), we contend that the family's role in shaping one's attitudes and beliefs about rights is preeminent, given that it is likely a person's first experience with such issues. Parents' knowledge and beliefs about rights are expected to be transmitted to their children either directly, such as through explicit discussion of rights-related issues, or indirectly, such as within the context of resolving family conflict.

As well, two types of rights were examined in this study, nurturance and self-determination. Previous research (e.g., Ruck, Abramovitch, & Keating, 1998; Ruck, Peterson-Badali, Day, & Wolfe, in preparation) suggests that age-related differences in the endorsement of nurturance versus self-determination clearly emerge, supporting their differentiation. For example, in one study (Ruck, Abramovitch, Keating, & Koegl, 1998), while participants of all ages endorsed the expression of nurturance rights, older children were more likely to advocate the assertion of self-determination rights than younger children.

Theoretical Framework

This study derives its theoretical framework from the work on parenting styles by Schaefer (1959) and Baumrind (1978, 1980). Schaefer (1959) proposed that parenting style comprises two dimensions: (a) autonomy versus control; and (b) love versus hostility. These dimensions interact to form four patterns: love-autonomy; love-control; hostility-autonomy; and hostility-control. According to Baumrind (1978), parenting style may be described in terms of two similar dimensions: (a) responsiveness; and (b) demandingness. Like Schaefer, these dimensions interact to form four parenting styles: authoritative; indulgent; authoritarian; and uninvolved.

Moreover, inherent within these parenting styles is an emphasis (greater or lessor) placed on the role of children's participation in family decision-making and resolution of family conflicts and in their own self-governance. Schaefer situated a democratic parenting style within the high autonomy and moderate love quadrant. Baumrind conceptualized the authoritative parenting style as the most conducive to encouraging the expression of family democracy. Following from these notions, five hypotheses were tested about the relationship between parenting style and attitudes toward rights issues and political attitudes.

Hypotheses

1. Both needs and autonomy issues will be relevant to parents who are perceived to be responsive. Therefore, adolescents who perceive their parents to be high in responsiveness will endorse both nurturance and self-determination rights to a greater extent than adolescents who perceive their parents to be low in responsiveness.
2. Adolescents' striving for independence is predicted to override the impact of parental demandingness and, therefore, a nonsignificant relationship is expected between adolescents' perception of their parents' demandingness and adolescents' ratings of the self-determination rights issues.

3. Similar to Hypothesis 1, parents who rate themselves as more responsive will endorse both the nurturance and self-determination rights to a greater extent than parents who rate themselves as less responsive.
4. Parents' control over their children's autonomy will be more salient for parents high in demandingness. Therefore, parents who rate themselves as more demanding will endorse the self-determination rights to a lesser extent than parents who rate themselves as less demanding.
5. Adolescents who perceive their parents to be authoritative will hold more positive attitudes toward children's nurturance and self-determination rights issues than adolescents who perceive their parents to be authoritarian.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 121 early- to mid-adolescents (50 sixth-, 36 eighth- and 35 tenth-graders) from Toronto, Canada, and their parents participated in the study. Their demographic characteristics are presented in Table 1. Based on the parents' highest level of education, participants came from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, though for 34% of the youth, the parents had completed university or college.

Measures

In an interview format, participants completed the following measures:

1. a modified version of the 30-item Parenting Style Questionnaire (PSQ; Paulson, & Caldwell, 1994); rated on a 5-point Likert-type scale;
2. 40-item version of the Children's Rights Attitudes Questionnaire (CRAQ), based in part on the Children's Rights Attitude Scale (CRAS; Rogers, & Wrightsman, 1978), rated on a 6-point Likert-type scale;
3. a modified version of the 26-item version of the Political Attitudes Questionnaire (PAQ; McCloskey, & Bann, 1979), a measure of conservative-liberal attitudes;
4. a demographic questionnaire.

Sample items from each of the measures are presented in Table 2. Where applicable, adolescents completed the parenting style questionnaire twice, once for their mother and once for their father. In 96% of the families, only one parent completed the measures. Note that the mothers' data were used in three families in which both parents completed the measures. Data were available for 67 mothers and 14 fathers. Responses to the CRAQ items were completed as they would apply to a 12-year-old child. Only students in grades 8 and 10 completed the PAQ.

Procedure

Adolescents were recruited in their home room classes. A Research Assistant explained the study to them and distributed the consent forms. Informed parental consent was obtained in writing both for student participation and for their own participation. Written assent was obtained from adolescents 14 years and older after reviewing the study requirements verbally and in written form with them. Verbal assent was obtained by adolescents under 14 years of age after following the same procedure.

RESULTS

Two sets of analyses were performed. First, zero-order correlations between the parenting style dimensions and the dependent variables and covariates are presented in Table 3. Second, results of the ANCOVAs and MANCOVAs, with the four parenting style types as the independent variable, are presented in Table 4.

Hypothesis 1

Contrary to expectation, nonsignificant correlations were found between adolescents' ratings of their mother's and father's responsiveness and their endorsement of nurturance rights. Also contrary to expectation, adolescents's ratings' of their mother's, but not their father's, responsiveness was negatively correlated with their endorsement of self-determination rights.

Hypothesis 2

As expected, nonsignificant correlations were found between adolescents' ratings of their mother's and father's demandingness and their endorsement of the self-determination rights.

Hypothesis 3

Contrary to expectation, nonsignificant correlations were found between parents' ratings of their own responsiveness and their ratings of the nurturance and self-determination items.

Hypothesis 4

As expected, parents who rated themselves as more demanding endorsed the self-determination rights to a lesser extent than parents who rated themselves as less demanding.

Using the 40^{th} and 60^{th} percentiles as cutoffs on the responsiveness and demandingness scales of the PSQ, three sets of parenting style typologies were created, based on (a) adolescents' perceptions of their mother; (b) adolescents' perception of their father; and (c) parents' perceptions of their own parenting style. Subsequently, ANCOVAs and MANCOVAs were conducted to test for mean differences on the dependent variables across the four parenting styles, controlling for adolescents' age and sex. Dependent variables were adolescents' and parents' ratings on the PAQ and the ratings on the nurturance and self-determination scales of the CRAQ. Differences across parenting style are reported only for the typology based on adolescents' perceptions of their mother, for which significant findings were yielded (see Table 4).

Hypothesis 5

Contrary to expectation, adolescents who perceived their mother as having an authoritative parenting style held a less positive attitude towards children's self-determination rights than adolescents who perceived their mother as having either an authoritarian or uninvolved parenting style, Pillai's Trace F (6,150) = 3.17, $p < .006$. Also contrary to expectation, no significant difference was found for the nurturance rights issues.

DISCUSSION

Drawing upon the work of Baumrind (1978, 1980), this study examined the role of parenting style on adolescents' attitudes toward nurturance and self-determination rights. The study findings suggest that parenting style influences adolescents' thinking about certain types of rights issues, though not in the way that was predicted.

Results indicated that adolescents' attitude towards self-determination, but not nurturance, issues was related to the level of perceived responsiveness of their mother; a low level of responsiveness was associated with a greater endorsement of these rights issues. In other words, controlling for age and sex, adolescents who perceived their mother to be uninvolved or authoritarian had, on average, higher scores on the self-determination subscale than adolescents who perceived their mother to be authoritative. This finding was contrary to expectation, but provides evidence that young people's attitudes toward self-determination rights issues are shaped by experiences at home, in the absence of a parent whom they perceive to be encouraging of their psychological development and responsive to their needs.

This finding suggests that adolescents' attitude towards autonomy rights may be learned as a result of their direct experience in asserting these rights within the context of a family environment in which they may feel a need to look elsewhere to gain a sense of being valued. The role of demandingness, however, remains to be seen, as high endorsement of the self-determination rights by adolescents was seen within the context of both high (i.e., authoritarian) and low (i.e., uninvolved), demandingness. It may be that different dynamics within the authoritarian and uninvolved families lead the adolescents to the same outcome, perhaps a dynamic associated with rebelliousness versus a dynamic associated with detachment.

Lastly, it is suggested that a strong commitment to self-determination rights by adolescents may be a negative outcome, reflecting an unqualified sense of entitlement and lack of awareness of one's rights bounded by the rights of others. The effect of responsiveness in parenting may serve to temper these beliefs and moderate the strong endorsement of self-determination rights issues.

A limitation of this study is that the parenting style typology was based on adolescents' perceptions of their mother's parenting styles, rather than direct observation of parenting behaviour. As well, the influence of other factors, such as peers and school needs to be examined in further research.

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Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample

	F	%
Sex		
Male	48	39.7
Female	72	59.5
Not Identified	1	.8
Grade		
6	50	41.3
7 & 8	36	29.8
10	35	28.9
Child's Race/Ethnicity		
Black	25	20.7
East Asian	5	4.1
Mid Eastern	6	5.0
South Asian	25	20.7
White or European	52	43.0
Other	8	7.8
Mean Age in Years		
Child	13.6	(SD = 1.8)
Father	43.2	(SD = 8.7)
Mother	41.0	(SD = 5.4)

Table 2.

Sample Scale Items

Parenting Style Questionnaire (PSQ) - Responsiveness

4. *My mother encourages me talk with her about things.*
6. *My mother praises me for doing well.*
22. *My mother thinks I should help with decisions in our family.*

Parenting Style Questionnaire (PSQ) - Demandingness

7. *My mother gets upset if I do not do the chores she gives me.*
14. *My mother has rules for me to follow.*
28. *My mother tells me her decisions should not be questioned.*

Child Rights Attitude Questionnaire (CRAQ) - Nurturance

14. *Children should have the right to quality day care.*
31. *Schools should be required to provide breakfast for those children who don't get adequate breakfasts at home.*
37. *Children should have the right to counselling when they are having emotional problems at school.*

Child Rights Attitude Questionnaire (CRAQ) - Self-Determination

17. *Children should have the right to choose their friends.*
18. *Children should have the right to keep their private diary from their parents.*
40. *Children should have the right to choose their friends even if their parents don't approve.*

Political Attitudes Scale (PAQ)

3. *Trying to make huge improvements in a society as complicated as ours is worth trying despite the risks* (liberal); *too risky* (conservative).
13. *Public ownership of large industry would be: a good idea* (liberal); *a bad idea* (conservative).
21. *If some people can't afford good housing: the government should provide it* (liberal); *they should work harder ands save, until they can afford it* (conservative).

Table 3.

Zero-Order Correlations

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Adolescent-Mom-R	-													
2. Adolescent-Mom-D	-.25**	-												
3. Adolescent-Dad-R	.57**	-.09	-											
4. Adolescent-Dad-D	-.03	.33**	-.13	-										
5. Parent-R	.17	.03	.36**	-.14	-									
6. Parent-D	-.16	.10	-.22	-.16	-.20	-								
7. Adolescent-Nurt	.10	.03	-.00	-.02	-.03	-.10	-							
8. Adolescent-SD	-.25**	-.15	-.03	-.14	-.12	-.03	.20*	-						
9. Parent-Nurt	.26*	-.19	.16	.08	.12	-.01	-.03	.00	-					
10. Parent-SD	.14	-.08	.06	.22	.15	-.43**	.20	.24*	.29**	-				
11. Adolescent-Conserv	-.04	-.08	-.09	-.17	-.01	.12	-.16	-.06	-.04	-.28	-			
12. Parent-Conserv	-.19	-.06	-.09	-.14	-.13	.09	-.15	-.00	-.35**	-.28*	.19	-		
13. Adolescents' Age	-.17	.05	-.19*	.00	-.14	-.01	-.12	-.12	-.04	.01	.17	-.01	-	
14. Adolescents' Sex	.05	.07	.04	.06	-.01	.03	.22*	-.06	.17	.10	-.17	-.24*	.05	-
N	120	120	111	111	82	82	121	121	82	82	71	82	121	120
Mean	3.7	3.0	3.5	2.9	4.2	3.5	5.3	4.0	5.5	3.2	28.4	29.6	13.6	n/a
SD	.66	.66	.72	.71	.36	.37	.54	.75	.46	.61	11.5	15.0	1.8	n/a
Cronbach's Alpha	.86	.86	.87	.85	.70	.61	.79	.75	.74	.81	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Note:

R is Responsiveness; D is Demandingness; Nurt is Nurturance; SD is Self-Determination; Conserv is Conservative Attitude.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

Table 4

Comparison of Adjusted Means Across Four Parenting Styles for Adolescents' Perceptions of their Mother

	Uninvolved (n = 14)	Authoritarian (n = 26)	Indulgent (n = 22)	Authoritative (n = 20)	Univariate F (df)
Responsive	2.36[a]	3.70[a]	2.35[b]	3.45[b]	66.06** (3,75)
Demanding	3.18[a]	3.06[b]	4.43[a]	4.21[b]	74.61** (3,75)
Nurturance (Adolescent)	5.14	5.39	5.31	5.39	1.45 (3,75)
Self-Determination (Adolescent)	4.45[a]	4.32[a]	4.00	3.65[b]	4.45* (3,75)
Nurturance (Parent)	5.42	5.16	5.59	5.60	2.47 (3,45)
Self-Determination (Parent)	3.64	3.14	3.33	3.35	.83 (3,45)
Conservative Attitude (Adolescent)	23.60	29.43	29.25	20.11	1.16 (3,44)
Conservative Attitude (Parent)	32.41	30.37	29.09	26.98	.91 (3,45)

Note.
Adjusted Mean scores with different superscripts are significantly different at $p < .05$.